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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 002154

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: THE "LEGAL" LEFT: SMALL, BUT DEDICATED

REF: A. MANILA 2096
[1](#)B. MANILA 2060
[1](#)C. MANILA 1965
[1](#)D. MANILA 1179
[1](#)E. MANILA 0695
[1](#)F. 05 MANILA 5506
[1](#)G. 05 MANILA 3788
[1](#)H. 05 MANILA 0410

Classified By: Acting Pol/C Joseph L. Novak for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The so-called "legal" left parties, which include Bayan Muna, Gabriela, the KMU, and Migrante, are an important aspect of the Philippine political scene. Most are linked with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) and, along with the mainstream Opposition, bitterly oppose President Arroyo. These leftist groups are on the defensive, with its representatives in Congress threatened with arrest or already incarcerated for "sedition," while a mounting number of its field cadre have been slain. Considered focused and dedicated, the legal left is dynamic, but its active hard-core membership is small and its overall impact on the body politic is relatively limited. That said, some in the GRP and military have wondered aloud whether the leftist parties should be banned outright. End Summary.

Key Leftist Groups

[1](#)2. (C) The legal left is an important aspect of the Filipino political scene. The dozen or so groups in this political basket are all closely linked to the underground CPP/NPA, which observers believe oversees their activities through a CPP unit called the National United Front Committee. They are also linked to the National Democratic Front (NDF), the negotiating arm of the CPP/NPA. In a classic Communist tactic, the CPP seeks to create or influence pre-existing groups to further its own ends (see ref F) and all of the groups mentioned below follow a "party line" congruent with that of the CPP. The groups include:

-- BAYAN (for "Bagong Alyansang Makabayan" meaning "New Alliance for the People"): BAYAN is an umbrella organization that links all of the leftist groups.

-- Bayan Muna ("People First"): This is the most well-known militant organization. In its mission statement, Bayan Muna says: "We stand on a platform of change that addresses the basic problems that have plagued our country -- foreign domination, feudal bondage, and a corrupt government." Bayan Muna was the first leftist group to field candidates under the party-list system. (Note: Party-list candidates, who are supposed to represent "marginalized constituencies," do

not compete head-to-head for congressional seats, but only need to garner two percent of the separate party-list vote nation-wide for a maximum allocation of three seats for any single party. End Note.) The party is led by Congressman Satur Ocampo and holds two other party-list seats in the House. Poe Gratela, a former leftist who now works at Malacanang, estimated that Bayan Muna has close to a thousand professional operatives directing the group's activities.

-- Gabriela: Gabriela is a radical women's organization. Liza Maza is its lone party-list representative. The group has led small rallies against the Visiting Forces Agreement, and the GRP's and USG's handling of the case of the four U.S. Marines accused of rape.

-- Anakpawis ("Toiling Masses"): This organization is linked to the KMU (see below) and another small organization, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas ("Peasant Movement of the Philippines"). Anakpawis has two representatives in Congress, including party leader Rep. Crispin Beltran, who remains in police custody on sedition charges.

-- KMU ("Kilusang Mayo Uno" or "May First Movement"): The KMU is a militant labor organization. Its operatives are active in sponsoring strikes and work stoppages. KMU operatives, for example, helped spark violence at Hacienda Luisita, a large estate with a sugar mill, located north of Manila in November 2004. Observers claim that KMU's main focus is not to assist workers obtain higher wages or improved conditions, but to extort money from employers, which it then gives to the CPP/NPA (see ref H).

-- Migrante: This group organizes among the millions of Filipino Overseas Foreign Workers (OFWs). It is also small,

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but it has activists spread out in key locations where OFW's work, including in the Middle East and Hong Kong (ref E).

-- Suara Bangsamoro ("Voice of the Moro Nation"): This is a small group made up of leftist Muslims. It has run on the party list, but not won any seats.

13. (C) Other important legal left groups include the League of Filipino Students, which is active at the university level (see ref G), and COURAGE, a leftist organization active among government employees. The group "Akbayan" is also a left-wing group with representatives in Congress. Akbayan, however, tilts in a social democratic direction and is not linked to the CPP/NPA. Representative Etta Rosales, the leader of the party who had formerly been linked to the CPP but then turned against it, is said to be on a NPA "hit list."

Link with Mainstream Opposition

14. (C) The legal left is fully committed to undermining the government of President Arroyo to the full extent possible. The statements of the left's leaders (and their websites) are full of invective toward the President. Teodoro "Teddy" Casino, a Bayan Muna representative, told Acting Pol/C in a meeting that "Arroyo and her family are corrupt; her administration has ordered the killings of my party's workers and has blood on its hands. She must resign." The left's stance in favor of the ouster of Arroyo has made for strange bedfellows: in 2001, the left pushed hard for the resignation of then-President Estrada insisting that he was corrupt, but it is now aligned with pro-Estrada elements in the anti-Arroyo effort. As reviewed in ref B, the mainstream Opposition is badly fractured and ineffective. On the contrary, the left is disciplined and focused, and is widely considered to be an effective, if small, element of the

anti-Arroyo effort. It often provides some of the more rambunctious participants at anti-Arroyo rallies, while its leaders -- who are articulate and press savvy -- are effective at slinging barbs at Malacanang. The fact that the left has a significant profile in public demonstrations is not always seen as a blessing, however. House Minority Leader Francis "Chiz" Escudero told Acting Pol/C on May 8 that some Opposition supporters, especially from the middle class or higher, were reluctant to attend rallies in which there was a sizable leftist presence.

15. (SBU) Along with most of the mainstream Opposition, the left supports a second try to impeach President Arroyo on corruption and abuse of power charges (the left's representatives in the House supported last year's unsuccessful impeachment effort). It has also come out against Malacanang's Charter Change plans. Re the latter issue, Bayan Muna has attacked the proposals, stating: "The shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system will not resolve in any way the current crisis we the people are facing. Should it happen, we will still be governed by people who hail from the same ruling, exploiting classes for whom self-serving interests are paramount."

On the Defensive

16. (C) Though it remains active in politics, the left is on the defensive. The government has charged that its representatives in the House are involved in seditious activities, and the police arrested Anakpawis' Crispin Beltran in February during the State of National Emergency. Beltran remains in custody on sedition charges. The government has also promised to press the case against five other leftist representatives in the House of Representatives. These five remained on the premises of the House compound from late February until early May, leaving only when Malacanang -- in response to an adverse court ruling -- announced that it would not arrest them at this point (ref C). The left has repeatedly denounced the government, charging that the Department of Justice's pressure on its House representatives is illegal and based on unfounded charges. GRP contacts have told us that they believe that the representatives are working closely with the CPP/NPA, including by passing their Congressional "pork barrel" funding to the NPA, and undertaking other activities that amount to "rebellion."

17. (SBU) There have also been many killings of the left's activists. So far this year, at least 29 leftist/labor activists have been slain in the Philippines (ref A). The

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latest killings add to the total of 40 for the whole of last year. Many of those killed were members of Bayan Muna. The left has harshly criticized the GRP, claiming that active or retired military and police elements are responsible for the attacks in a deliberate bid to silence the left and hobble its political efforts. Teddy Casino of Bayan Muna told Acting Pol/C that the killings have forced his party to restrict its activities out of fear of violence. He added that the amount of threatening messages that activists are receiving has gone way up in recent months, perhaps presaging more attacks. The GRP has denied the charges of involvement, recently forming a task force to coordinate the criminal investigations. Some in the government have attributed the attacks to an ongoing NPA "purge." Over the course of years, there have been very few arrests and even fewer convictions related to the attacks. Mission continues to urge the GRP to reinforce the rule of law and to end the culture of impunity.

Comment

18. (C) Considered focused and dedicated, the legal left is dynamic, but its number of hard-core activists is small (perhaps only several thousand in total) and its overall impact on Philippine politics is relatively limited (its representatives in the House have had virtually no impact on legislation, for example). Elements of the GRP and military are clearly worried about its activities, however, with some publicly and privately wondering whether its activities should be banned outright and the left kicked out of Congress. That said, many in the Philippines believe that the decision taken after the end of the Marcos regime to allow the left into overt politics was a good one, offering a way to co-opt its more moderate elements and bring them into the mainstream. A significant threat to this experiment with the left, however, is the ongoing extra-judicial killings of its activists, which serve to polarize further an already volatile Philippine political situation.

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Kenney